

Remarks on House of Representatives Action on Permanent Normal Trade Relations With China

May 24, 2000

Good afternoon. Today the House of Representatives has taken an historic step toward continued prosperity in America, reform in China, and peace in the world. If the Senate votes as the House has just done to extend permanent normal trade relations with China, it will open new doors of trade for America and new hope for change in China.

Seven years ago, when I became President, I charted a new course for a new economy, a course of fiscal discipline, investment in our people, and open trade. I have always believed that by opening markets abroad, we open opportunities at home. We've worked hard to advance that goal of more open and more fair trade since 1993, all the way up to the landmark legislation I signed just a few days ago to expand trade with Africa and the Caribbean Basin.

Just this week Speaker Hastert and I reached an agreement that many Members of the House in both parties have already supported, to bring the same kinds of investment opportunity and jobs to America's new markets, to people and places here in this country who have not yet participated in our prosperity, in rural areas, inner cities, on our Native American reservations.

With more than a billion people, China is the largest new market in the world. Our administration has negotiated an agreement which will open China's markets to American products made on American soil, everything from corn to chemicals to computers. Today the House has affirmed that agreement.

We will be exporting, however, more than our products. By this agreement, we will also export more of one of our most cherished values, economic freedom. Bringing China into the WTO and normalizing trade will strengthen those who fight for the environment, for labor standards, for human rights, for the rule of law.

For China, this agreement will clearly increase the benefits of cooperation and the costs of confrontation. America, of course, will continue to defend our interests, but at this stage in China's development, we will have more positive influence with an outstretched hand than with a

clenched fist. The House today has affirmed that belief.

Now, I have spoken personally to many, many Members of Congress. I have heard their concerns and those of their constituents. I know this, for many, was a difficult vote. Decisions like this one test our deepest beliefs. They challenge our hopes, and they call forth our fears. Though China may be changing, we all know it remains a one-party state, that it still denies people the rights of free speech and religious expression. We know that trade alone will not bring freedom to China or peace to the world. That's why permanent normal trade relations must also signal our commitment to permanent change.

America will keep pressing to protect our security and to advance our values. The vote today is a big boost to both efforts. For the more China liberalizes its economy, the more it will liberate the potential of its people—to work without restraint, to live without fear.

In January I pledged an all-out effort to take this important step. I want to thank everyone who has joined in it. I want to express special gratitude to Speaker Hastert for his leadership, to Congressman Archer and Congressman Rangel of the Ways and Means Committee. I also want to acknowledge Congressman Levin and Congressman Bereuter, who authored a provision on human rights that improves this bill and strengthens our ability to stand up for our values.

I thank all the others who spoke out for this action, including all our former Presidents, all the former Secretaries of State, Defense, trade ministers, other Cabinet members, all the military leaders. I thank those who worked for human rights and the rule of law who spoke out for this legislation. And of course, I want to thank all those who worked in this administration: Secretary Daley, for spearheading our campaign; Charlene Barshefsky and Gene Sperling, for their negotiation of the agreement; Steve Ricchetti, here in the White House; and Sandy Berger and all the others who worked so hard for this agreement here. I appreciate what everyone has done.

Today the House has taken an important step for the kind of future I think we all want for our children, for an America that will be more prosperous and more secure, for a China that is more open to our products and more respectful of the rule of law at home and abroad. The House has spoken, and now the eyes of the world turn toward the United States Senate. I am confident it, too, will act swiftly to advance these interests.

I will be speaking with many Senators in the days ahead to ensure that we continue to move ahead to get this done as promptly as possible. This is one of the most important votes the Senate will face in this session. I hope we can build on our momentum on this issue and on other pressing priorities, as well.

I still believe the Congress can act to add voluntary prescription drug coverage to Medicare, to invest more in our children's education, to pass the legislation to invest in these American markets here at home, to pass the common-sense gun safety legislation, to raise the minimum wage.

Again, I thank the House, and I look forward to working with the Congress in the days ahead.

This is a good day for America. And 10 years from now we will look back on this day and be glad we did this. We will see that we have

given ourselves a chance to build the kind of future we want. This is a good economic agreement because we get all the economic benefits of lowered tariffs and lowered access to the Chinese market. We get new protections against dumping of products in our own markets. What we have granted is full membership in the World Trade Organization, which brings China into a rule-based international system.

But I have said many times, and I'd just like to say once more, to me, the most important benefit of all is that we have given ourselves and the Chinese a chance—not a guarantee but a chance—to build a future in the Asia-Pacific region for the next 50 years very different from the last 50. We fought three wars in that part of the world. A lot of Americans died for freedom; a lot of sacrifice should not go unredeemed. We owe it to them, to their children, and to our children and grandchildren to give the world a chance to build a better and a different future. We have taken a big step toward giving them that chance today.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:03 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Public Law 106-200, the Trade and Development Act of 2000.

Remarks at the Democratic National Committee's "National Tribute to President Clinton"

May 24, 2000

Well, first of all, thank you, thank you very much. Let me tell you something—wait, turn this on. If you'd turn this on, they could hear me instead of them.

Now, I don't believe that it's corruption to take money to pass the Brady bill, instead of beat it; to pass the family and medical leave bill, so 21 million ordinary working people can take some time off when their babies are born and their parents are sick, instead of to beat it; to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights, instead of to beat it; to reduce the deficit and get rid of the debt, instead of keep giving big breaks to special interests. I don't think that is corruption. I think that's good for America. That's why we're here tonight; that's why you're here to-

night. We made a difference, and I'm glad you're helping us to win the next election. Thank you.

Let me also say to all of you how grateful I am that you're here, how grateful I am for your support. I thank Ed and Joe and Loretta and Dennis and all their predecessors in the Democratic Party. I thank my good friends Dick Gephardt and Tom Daschle, who will be the leaders of their respective chambers after the election. I thank Terry McAuliffe for making sure we'll be able to stick out there and give our message to fight for our candidates and elect our President in the year 2000. Thank you, Terry, and thank all of you who helped tonight.